

Louis XIV's reign was hyper-vigilant about disarming the aristocracy and other factional sources of power because of the political instability he witnessed as a child during "La Fronde" (Neal 110). These events shaped the young monarch and how he handled his position throughout his rule--never allowing for another group to have access to too much power. Louis XIV's "absolute power" was actually quite weak in terms of economics because of the "lack of a coherent system of taxation" (Neal 105). The archaic taxation system allowed little revenue for the monarchy at a maximum price to his subjects, which left him comparatively destitute for a French monarch (Neal 105). Even with the growing national debt, Louis XIV used his position to support his excessive spending habits. The unequal powers led to devastation in the years leading up to the French Revolution. The system of government in place during Louis XIV's reign is a model that can be avoided in modern-day society because of the use of a system with checks and balances. Expecting the tax-base to cover the drastic spending of those in the "higher" positions of authority can only last so long before the people demand a more accommodating regime.

Louis XIV was a patron of the arts and loved to commission portraits and statues of himself. He also spent money in a very elaborate fashion, expanding the Palace of Versailles and adorning it in gold and intricate detailing (Louis XIV of France). This frivolous spending created tensions between the social classes. These tensions were further increased by the idea that monarchs were considered divine, ruling the lowly subjects. Jean Nocret's *Louis XIV et la famille royale* is a great example of one of Louis's commissions of himself and his family. The allusions to Greek and Roman mythology are the focal point of this piece, drawing a direct comparison between the royal family and divine figures. It depicts the royal family as gods, with Louis XIV being a commanding presence in the portrait, draped in gold robes.

In this painting, Louis XIV is depicted as Apollo, the god of music, poetry, art, the Sun, and knowledge. This is appropriate for the monarch who is referred to as the "Sun King" (Neal 115). Even though Louis XIV is surrounded by his family of gods and goddesses, they still appear to be inferior to him as he sits in his throne. Louis XIV's fusion with the god Apollo indicates his status as one of the "superior" gods since Apollo was a key player in Greek and Roman mythology. Louis XIV also takes up the most space in this portrait, a further symbol of his dominance. The edges of each object and person in this painting are soft, giving the painting a feeling of idyllic paradise--a luxury only the gods could afford. The child angels in the center of the portrait are even providing angelic, heavenly music for the gods' pleasure to accompany the perfect scene. The colors are also very vibrant, suggesting the rich, extravagant lifestyle. The blues and greens of the forest scene evoke calm and relaxing feelings. The red drapes on Louis XIV's throne represent power and passion as a ruler. The gold also sets him apart from the other figures, who are dressed in more subtle colors. The women in the portrait are mostly draped in calmer, less domineering colors, like whites and pale pink. The women are also adorned in flowers, suggesting their delicate dispositions. The peacock located near the throne signifies royalty as it is considered to be a very beautiful and noble-looking creature.

This picture allows the royal family to transcend the mere mortals and their world. This divide caused strife between the authority figures and the "common" people. A state of instability like the one found during Louis XIV's reign cannot be sustained. The United States' system of checks and balances allows for the tax-base to be actually involved in the decision-making process. No branch of government can have too much power, which is something that has been learned after studying the monarchies of Western history. People will only tolerate severe inequalities for so long, especially when they have to sacrifice their time and money in

order to pay for the lifestyle of the higher powers, like Louis XIV. Even with today's democracy, the government needs to be careful with how it allocates its resources because there is power in numbers when the masses decide to make a change.



*Louis XIV et la famille royale*  
by Jean Nocret

Works Cited

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